

APPLICATION
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TITLE: UNIVERSAL EDGE NODE

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UNIVERSAL EDGE NODE

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to high-speed data traffic processing and, in particular, to a universal edge node that is used in multi-service switching of high-speed data traffic.

BACKGROUND

Data networks are generally constructed using a number of edge switches, also called edge nodes, that are connected to local data sources and data sinks. An edge node consists of a source node and a sink node that may share a common controller. The edge nodes are interconnected by a network core that switches traffic between edge nodes. The network core may be distributed and it may include several geographically distributed core nodes. The network core may also be agile, being able to reconfigure to follow fluctuating traffic demands.

Links interconnecting the edge nodes and the core nodes support communications paths for transferring data between edge nodes. Each of the communications paths has a predetermined granularity defined as an integer multiple of a capacity unit. A capacity unit is the minimum capacity, in bits/s, that can be assigned to a traffic stream. Paths of uniform granularity have been traditionally used in data networks.

The performance, efficiency and scalability of a data network depend heavily on a property of the nodes in the network called "degree" (nodal degree) and on a property of the network, which is directly related to the nodal degree, called "network diameter". The degree of a specific node is a measure of the number of nodes to which the specific node directly connects. The diameter of a network is a measure of the maximum number of hops (links) in the shortest path between any two nodes. The higher the nodal degree, the smaller the network diameter. A small network diameter generally yields both high performance and high efficiency. On the other hand, for a given nodal degree, scalability generally increases with the network

diameter, but to the detriment of network efficiency. It is therefore advantageous to increase the nodal degree to the highest limit that technology permits.

The number of sink nodes to which the source node can send traffic, without the traffic having to be switched at an intermediate edge node, is directly related to the nodal degree of the source node. The nodal degree of a source node is also related to the number of output ports supported by the source node and the speed of switching by the source node. In particular, a fine switching granularity (requiring relatively fast switching) provides a greater nodal degree than a coarse switching granularity. An electronic edge node is inherently fast switching, thereby enabling the division of the capacity of the output ports into relatively small units. To match this capability of the source node, an optical core node is required to be fast switching.

In one known scheme of optical-fiber link capacity division, the links that connect nodes are divided into channels, where each channel is associated with a wavelength. The nodal degree of a source node in this scheme is limited by the number of channels emanating from the source node, which is typically significantly smaller than the number of edge nodes in the network.

In another scheme of link capacity division, links or channels are divided according to a system of time sharing. Time sharing enables fine switching granularity and, hence, a high nodal degree. Schemes based on effective time sharing typically require: (a) that the edge nodes be time-locked to the core nodes; (b) that all nodes be fast switching; and (c) that a path between two edge nodes traverse a single optical core node. A node X is said to be time-locked to a node Y if, at any instant of time, the reading of a time-counter at node X equals the sum of a reading of an identical time-counter at node Y and the propagation time from node X to node Y, where the time-counters at nodes X and Y have the same period and the propagation delay is expressed in the same time unit in which the counter reading is expressed. Thus, if an edge node is time-locked to a core node and the edge node transmits a pulse to the core node when the edge node time-counter reading is τ , the pulse should arrive at the core node when the core node time-counter reading is τ .

Time Division Multiplexing (TDM) and burst switching are two systems of time sharing. At an edge node using TDM, data is organized in a time-slotted frame of a predefined duration. Data traffic from a source node to a sink node may be allocated at least one time slot. In burst switching, data packets are aggregated, at an edge
5 node, into bursts, where the bursts are generally of different duration. Each burst is switched at the core node towards the destination sink node of the burst. At the sink node, the burst may be disassembled into constituent data packets. Systems of time sharing can be exploited to increase the nodal degree and, by so doing, reduce the network diameter. The application of TDM in an optical-core network is described in
10 Applicant's United States Patent application, Serial No. 09/960,959, filed on September 25, 2001 and titled "Switched Channel-Band Network," the specification of which is incorporated herein by reference.

This division of capacity of optical links, provided by these schemes and others, allows a data stream, transmitted from a source node, to specify a level of
15 service required while being transferred to a sink node, perhaps via one or more core nodes. It is then a necessity of the source node to have a service-quality control system to receive the requirement specified for the data stream and provide, if possible, the specified requirement.

The present-day Internet employs routers that were not built with the flexibility
20 required to incorporate service-quality control in a scalable network. Additionally, the introduction of new services and new capabilities in the current Internet requires expensive patchwork and may result in a complex, engineering-intensive, difficult-to-control network.

Clearly, there exists a need for an edge node that incorporates service-quality
25 control capabilities, and enables the construction of agile networks, i.e., networks that can efficiently accommodate wide variation of the spatial and temporal distribution of traffic, and that can transfer data streams having widely varied requirement and adapt to provide various levels of service.

With diverse transfer rate requirements, which may vary from a few Kb/s to a
30 few Gb/s, there is a need for an edge node that is capable of efficiently handling

extremes in transfer rate and distribution of traffic, and adaptively modifying path capacities without unmanageable control complexity.

There is also a need for an edge node that provides data-rate control and can work with an optical core node

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SUMMARY

The present invention enables the construction of agile networks that require minimal engineering. A universal electronic switching node serves as an edge node in a high-capacity network with an optical core. The universal node may handle a variety of traffic classes and may control traffic admission, connection definition, connection routing and core node configuration. The provided capabilities significantly simplify network operation and control.

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In accordance with an aspect of the present invention there is provided an edge node adapted to serve a multiplicity of data streams. The edge node includes a plurality of input ports adapted to receive the data streams, wherein each of the input ports includes an input-port controller and at least one of the input ports includes a bitrate-estimation device adapted to compute a bitrate requirement for each of the data streams, a plurality of output ports, wherein each of the output ports includes an output-port controller and at least one of the output ports includes a time locking device adapted to control a data transmit time from the at least one of the output ports, a switching fabric adapted to connect any of the input ports to any of the output ports and an edge controller. The edge controller includes an edge control processor adapted to communicate with the plurality of input ports and the plurality of output ports, a route selection device, in communication with the edge control processor, adapted to select a route for each of the data streams, a fabric scheduling device, in communication with the edge control processor, adapted to determine a distinct time of transfer for each of a set of data segments, into which each of the data streams are segmented, across the switching fabric and a bitrate-allocation device, in communication with the edge control processor, adapted to allocate a bitrate of a data stream based, at least in part, on bitrate requirement for the data stream computed by the bitrate-estimation device.

In accordance with another aspect of the present invention there is provided a method of determining a bitrate requirement for a connection. The method includes receiving a packet, where the packet includes an indication of a type for the connection, determining, from the indication, a type for the connection, if the connection is determined to be of a first type, extracting an explicit bitrate-allocation requirement from the packet, if the connection is determined to be of a second type, computing the bitrate requirement from parameters characterizing the traffic associated with the connection and if the connection type is determined to be of a third type, deducing the bitrate requirement from data stream monitoring.

In accordance with a further aspect of the present invention there is provided an edge node for high-speed traffic processing. The edge node includes a switching fabric, a plurality of input ports in communication with the switching fabric, each of the plurality of input ports having an input-port controller, a plurality of output ports in communication with the switching fabric, each of the plurality of output ports having an output-port controller and an edge node controller in communication with the switching fabric, each of the input-port controllers and each of the output-port controllers. The edge node controller includes a high-speed scheduling device, the high-speed scheduling device operable to receive bitrate allocation information from at least one input-port controller, maintain a state of a given input port associated with the at least one input-port controller, maintain a state of each of the plurality of output ports, assign time slots of a scheduling frame to communicate data segments from the given input port to one or more of the output ports, where the number of the time slots allocated to a given output port is based on the bitrate allocation information and transmit the scheduling frame to the corresponding input-port controller.

In accordance with a still further aspect of the present invention there is provided a method of data scheduling in an edge node. The method includes receiving bitrate allocation information from an input-port controller, maintaining a state of a given input port associated with the input-port controller, maintaining a state of each of a plurality of output ports, assigning time slots of a scheduling frame to communicate data segments from the given input port to one or more of the output ports, where the number of the time slots allocated to a given output port is based on

the bitrate allocation information and transmitting the scheduling frame to the input-port controller. In a further aspect of the invention, a device is provided for high-speed scheduling according to this method.

5 In accordance with an even further aspect of the present invention there is provided a method of scheduling a transfer of data segments through a switching fabric from a plurality of input ports of the switching fabric to a plurality of output ports of the switching fabric wherein a scheduling frame having a predetermined number of time slots and an equal, predetermined duration is associated with each of the plurality of input ports. The method includes dividing the duration of each scheduling frame into a plurality of time windows, dividing the plurality of input ports into input-port groups, for each scheduling frame, forming a plurality of non-intersecting scheduling domains, where each scheduling domain associates one of the input-port groups with one of the plurality of time windows, concurrently executing scheduling processes, one scheduling process for each of the non-intersecting scheduling domains, each scheduling process determining a schedule that indicates, for a given scheduling domain, a timing for a transfer of data segments to selected ones of the plurality of output ports from the input ports associated with the time window in the given scheduling domain and, at least where the executing does not use all the time windows of a given scheduling frame, repeating the forming and the executing for permutations of the input-port groups and time windows.

15 In accordance with still another aspect of the present invention there is provided, in an edge node comprising a plurality of input ports, a plurality of output ports and a switching fabric, a fabric-scheduling apparatus. The fabric-scheduling apparatus includes a plurality of input-port scheduling devices, where each of the input-port scheduling devices is associated with an input-port group and each input-port group is a sub-set of the plurality of input ports, each of the input-port scheduling devices including: a receiver adapted to receive bitrate allocations from controllers of the plurality of input ports and translate each bitrate allocation into translated bitrate allocations, where each translated bitrate allocation indicates a required number of time-slots for a predefined scheduling frame duration, a ring-list generator adapted to form a ring-list from the translated bitrate allocations received from the receiver, a ring-list time-slot assignment circuit adapted to: receive the ring-list from the ring-list

generator; perform an assignment of each time-slot in a predefined time-slotted scheduling frame to a transfer of a data segment from one of the input ports in the input-port group associated with the input-port scheduling devices to one of the plurality of output ports; and modify the ring-list to reflect the assignment, a ring-list memory adapted to maintain the modified ring-list and a plurality of output-state memory devices, each of the output-state memory devices associated with a predefined time window and an access-control device is adapted to cyclically connect each of the input-port scheduling devices with each of the output-state memory devices.

Other aspects and features of the present invention will become apparent to those of ordinary skill in the art upon review of the following description of specific embodiments of the invention in conjunction with the accompanying figures.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

In the figures which illustrate example embodiments of this invention:

FIG. 1 illustrates a data network suitable for use with the present invention wherein a static core is used for communication between edge nodes;

FIG. 2 illustrates a data network suitable for use with the present invention wherein an agile core is used for communication between edge nodes;

FIG. 3 illustrates a data network suitable for use with the present invention wherein both a static core and an agile core are used for communication between edge nodes;

FIG. 4 illustrates the communication between specific ones of the edge nodes of FIG. 3 according to an embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 5 schematically illustrates main components of an overall control mechanism of an edge node according to an embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. **6A** schematically illustrates one manner of communication between an edge node controller, input ports and output ports according to an embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. **6B** schematically illustrates another manner of communication between an edge node controller, input ports and output ports according to an embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. **7** schematically illustrates, in further detail, components of an edge node according to an embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. **8** schematically illustrates an input port controller according to an embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. **9** schematically illustrates an output port controller according to an embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. **10A** illustrates the logical structure of an input buffer of the input port controller of FIG. **8** according to an embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. **10B** illustrates the logical structure of an output buffer of the output port controller of FIG. **9** according to an embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. **11** schematically illustrates an edge controller according to an embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. **12** illustrates admission-control thresholds according to an embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. **13** illustrates exemplary changes in capacity allocation of a path based on the occupancy of a corresponding packet buffer;

FIG. **14** illustrates steps in a method for determining a bitrate allocation requirement according to an embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. **15A** illustrates a rotator-based high-capacity switching fabric, for use with an embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. **15B** illustrates an alternative representation of the rotator-based high-capacity switching fabric of FIG. **15A**;

FIG. **16** illustrates the use of internal expansion in the rotator-based switching fabric of FIG. **15A** and **15B**;

5 FIG. **17A** illustrates state matrices indicating the free-busy state of input ports and output ports in a space-switch fabric after completion of a first step in a time-slotted sequential scheduling steps, for use in an embodiment of the present invention;

10 FIG. **17B** illustrates the state matrices of FIG. **17A** after completion of a second step, for use in an embodiment of the present invention;

15 FIG. **18A** illustrates matrices indicating the free-busy state of input ports and output ports in a rotator-based switching fabric after completion of a first step in a time-slotted sequential scheduling steps, for use in an embodiment of the present invention;

20 FIG. **18B** illustrates state matrices of FIG. **18A** after completion of a second step, for use in an embodiment of the present invention;

25 FIG. **19A** illustrates a state-vector of an input port in the edge node of FIG. 7, for use with an embodiment of the present invention;

30 FIG. **19B** illustrates a demand vector indicating the number of time slots per time-frame for each output port in an edge node, for use with an embodiment of the present invention;

35 FIG. **19C** illustrates alternate representation of the demand vector of FIG. **19B** where each entry corresponds to an output port;

40 FIG. **19D** illustrates the demand vector of FIG. **19C** with scrambled entries for use with an embodiment of the present invention;

45 FIG. **19E** illustrates a prior-art reverse-binary scrambling rule;

FIG. 20 illustrates the content of an output-state memory during a time window;

FIG. 21A illustrates the structure of a ring-list having a ring of data records, for use in an embodiment of the present invention;

5 FIG. 21B illustrates an update of the structure of the ring-list of FIG. 21A after the removal of one of the data records of the ring-list, for use in an embodiment of the present invention;

10 FIG. 22A illustrates an alternate structure of a ring-list wherein a data record is dedicated to each data segment, for use with an embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 22B illustrates an update of the ring-list of FIG. 22A due to the removal of one of the data blocks, for use with an embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 23 schematically illustrates a packet scheduler according to an embodiment of the present invention;

15 FIG. 24 illustrates an implementation of the packet scheduler of FIG. 23 according to an embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 25 illustrates another implementation of the packet scheduler of FIG. 23 according to an embodiment of the present invention; and

20 FIG. 26 illustrates an assembly of packet schedulers, the assembly comprising a plurality of packet schedulers of FIG. 23, according to an embodiment of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

25 FIG. 1 illustrates a network 100 of electronic edge nodes 120A, 120B, 120C, 120D, 120E, 120F, 120G, 120H, 120P (known herein individually or collectively as 120) interconnected by a static optical core 130, with each edge node 120 having a number of direct paths to the static optical core 130. The edge nodes 120 support traffic sources and sinks (not shown). The static optical core 130 is made up of a

number of static core nodes **180**. A static core node maintains its input-output connections pattern over an extended period of time. Core nodes **180** may be interconnected by optical-fiber links.

The static optical core **130** affords simplicity of control. However, the static optical core **130** can lead to inefficiency. A network that provides the capability to modify node-pair connectivity is highly desirable. The simplest network that enables core agility is a star network where edge nodes interchange data through a common core node. An exemplary star network is part of a larger network structure in FIG. 2. The edge nodes **120** can communicate with each other via a single agile core node **280**. The main attractions of star network are high performance and simplicity of control. However, a star network is only suitable for limited geographic or topological coverage. A composite-star network **200**, illustrated in FIG. 2, may be viewed as a superposition of several star networks which are merged only at the edge nodes **120** while the agile core nodes **280** can be widely distributed and independent. The agile core nodes **280** in an agile optical core **230** of a composite-star network are not connected to each other. The composite-star network retains the attractive properties of a star network while providing a wide geographic and topological coverage. The composite-star network will be used for the purpose of describing some of the embodiments of the present invention. A star network is treated as a component of a composite-star network.

A network can be constructed to combine both the static optical core **130** and the agile optical core **230** as depicted in a hybrid network **300** illustrated in FIG. 3 comprising a static core and an agile core. The static optical core **130** would be used to establish paths for data streams having predictable bitrate requirements. Such an arrangement requires the edge node **120** to have the capability to interface with both legacy networks that employ static core nodes **180** and new networks that employ agile core nodes **280**.

As illustrated in FIG. 4, each edge node **120** has a plurality of input ports **412** and a plurality of output ports **414**. The number of input ports need not equal the number of output ports. The input ports **412** of the edge node **120** may be divided into source ports **412S**, which receive data from data sources, and receiving ports

412C, which receive data from other edge nodes **120** or from core nodes **180, 280**. Likewise. The output ports **414** of the edge node **120** may be divided into sink ports **414S**, which deliver data to data sinks, and departure ports **414C**, which send data to other edge nodes **120** or to core nodes **180, 280**. Hereinafter, an upstream link of an edge node **120** refers to a link from the edge node **120** to another edge node **120** or to a core node **180, 280**, and a downstream link of an edge node **120** refers to a link incoming to the edge node **120** from another edge node **120** or from a core node **180, 280**. Upstream links connect to departure ports **412C** of the edge node **120** and downstream links connect to the receiving ports **414C** of the edge node **120**.

The connections illustrated in FIG. 3 between edge nodes **120D, 120H, 120G** and **120P** are presented in a different format in FIG. 4. The format of FIG. 4 allows for the introduction of more detail for the edge nodes **120**. In particular, the edge node **120D**, which is upstream for most of the connections, is shown to receive input from traffic sources and from core nodes. The source port **412S** is used to receive from sources, while the receiving port **412C** is used to receive from core nodes. Similarly, the sink port **414S** is used to send data to sinks and the departure port **414C** is used to send data to core nodes.

A given network may be classified according to “switching granularity”, i.e., according to the minimum size of a switched data unit or minimum data rate that may be switched in the given network, which may be determined by both spectral division and the time division of the telecommunication medium. FIG. 4 illustrates an example of a network that includes static core nodes **180** (also known as cross connectors) that connect entire channels from the input ports to respective output ports, and agile core nodes **280** that adaptively switch entire channels. An agile core node **280** is also capable of switching sub-channels using time-sharing schemes such as TDM (time-division-multiplexing) or burst switching.

The main components of an overall control mechanism in a universal edge node **120** are illustrated in FIG. 5. The overall control mechanism comprises an edge node controller **580** which interacts with a plurality of input port controllers **540**, each corresponding to an input port, a plurality of output-port controllers **550**, each corresponding to an output port and a switching fabric **520**. The input-port controllers

540 and the output-port controllers **550** may, in some embodiments, have an ability to exchange control data directly through an inter-port link **510**.

The flexibility of each edge node **120** is enabled by the edge node controller **580**. FIG. **6A** and FIG. **6B** illustrate two arrangements for connecting the edge node controller **580** to the input-port controllers **540** and the output-port controllers **550**. In FIG. **6A** and FIG. **6B** the input-port controllers **540** and the output-port controllers **550** are not shown, but are understood to be associated with the source ports **412S**, the receiving port **412C**, the sink ports **414S** and the departure ports **414C**, which are shown.

In a first arrangement, illustrated in FIG. **6A**, the input ports **412** and the edge node controller **580** exchange control messages on an input communication bus **620** while the output ports **414** and the edge node controller **580** exchange control messages on an output communication bus **630**. In this arrangement, the number of input ports need not equal the number of output ports.

A second arrangement applies only to a symmetrical switch, i.e., where the number of input ports equals the number of output ports. An input port **412** may send control messages through the switching fabric **520** to a control output port **650** where the control messages are sent to the edge node controller **580**. Additionally, the edge node controller **580** may send control messages to a control input port **640** where the control messages are sent through the switching fabric **520** to an output port **414**. To send control messages to the edge node controller **580**, an output port **414** may first send the control messages to an associated input port **412** using the inter-port link **510** (see FIG. **5**). Similarly, control messages to an input port **412** may first be sent, by the edge node controller **580**, to an associated output port **414** where the control messages may be sent to the input port **412** using the inter-port link **510**. Notably, the control input port **640** and the control output port **650** are dedicated to control data and do not handle payload data.

In FIG. **7**, an edge node **120** supports local traffic sources and local traffic sinks (not shown). The source ports **412S** receive data from local traffic sources and the receiving ports **412C** receive data from traffic sources of other edge nodes **120**

through core nodes **180, 280**. Similarly, the sink ports **414S** deliver data to local traffic sinks and the departure ports **414C** send data to traffic sinks of other edge nodes **120** through core nodes **180, 280**. A downstream link **722** using WDM (Wavelength-division multiplexing) is demultiplexed into individual wavelength input channels **729** at a WDM demultiplexer **728** and each wavelength input channel **729** connects to a receiving port **412C** after optical-to-electronic (O/E) conversion at an Optical/Electrical interface **708**. A plurality of departure ports **414C** connect to a number of individual wavelength output channels **739** after an electrical-to-optical (E/O) conversion at an electronic/optical (E/O) interface **709**. The wavelength output channels **739** are multiplexed at a WDM multiplexer **738** into an upstream link **732**, which connects to a core node **180, 280** (not shown).

Using the control bus-interconnection illustrated in FIG. **6A**, the edge node controller **580** communicates directly with the input-port controllers **540** and the output-port controllers **550**. Where the switching fabric **520** is symmetrical (i.e., the number of input ports equals the number of output ports), the edge node controller **580** can use the control ports **640, 650** illustrated in FIG. **6B** wherein the edge node controller **580** receives control data through the control output port **650** and sends control data through the control input port **640**. Notably, it is possible, and may be necessary, to provide more than one control input port **640** and/or more than one control output port **650** in a given edge node **120**.

The switching fabric **520** need not be symmetrical, i.e., the number of input ports need not equal the number of output ports. The inequality can be designed to accommodate such network-dependent conditions as significant traffic asymmetry and the use of multi-casting, wherein a data stream from a single source is sent to multiple sinks.

The main components of the input-port controller **540** are illustrated in FIG. **8**. A data receiver **810** receives data from the associated input port **412** and passes the data to a destination identifier **812** that determines, based on header information included in the data, the output port to which the data should be sent. Information regarding the amount of data and the destination output port of the data is sent to an input port processor **850** while the data itself is sent to an input buffer **818**. The input

port processor **850** communicates with the input buffer **818** to learn about the occupancy of the input buffer **818** and to specify a queue from which to send data to a data formatter **820**. Occupancy information may also be sent from the input buffer **818** to a bitrate allocation requirement estimator **840**. The bitrate allocation requirement estimator **840** includes an on/off hysteresis controller **842** and a bitrate increment hysteresis controller **844**. Output from the bitrate allocation requirement estimator **840** enables the input port processor **850** to determine a bitrate at which to send individual data streams to the switching fabric **520**. Determining when, and at what rate, to send data to the switching fabric **520** is determined by control messages received at the input port processor **850** from the edge node controller **580** via an input edge controller interface **816**. Before being sent to the switching fabric **520**, the data is formatted by the data formatter **820**. Finally, a data sender **824** receives data from the data formatter **820** under the control of a segment dequeuing circuit **822**. The data sender **824** then sends the data to the switching fabric **520**.

The main components of the output-port controller **550** are illustrated in FIG. 9. Data is received from the switching fabric **520** at a data receiver **910**. From the data receiver **910**, the data is passed to a source identifier **912** at which the input port at which the data was sent to the switching fabric **520** is identified. The data, along with an indication of the identified input port is passed to an output buffer **918**. Meantime, information regarding the amount of data and the source input port of the data is sent to an output port processor **950**. The output port processor **950** communicates with a time-locking device **920**, which communicates with a data sender **924**. The data sender **924** is also in communication with the output buffer **918** to receive the data to be sent to the output port **414**. Determining when to send data to the output port **414** is determined by control messages received at the output port processor **950** from the edge node controller **580** via an output edge controller interface **916**.

A storage facility is provided as part of each input-port controller **540** in the form of the input buffer **818**. A structure for queues in the input buffer **818** is illustrated in FIG. 10A. The input buffer **818** includes a control-data queue **1010** and a number of data queues **1020** equivalent to the number of output ports **414**. The

control-data queue **1010** is preferably maintained on a memory separate from the memory on which the data queues **1020** are maintained if the arrangement of FIG. **6A** is used for communication between port controllers and the edge node controller **580**. In the alternative arrangement of FIG. **6B**, the data queues **1020** and the control-data queue **1010** are preferably maintained on the same memory.

FIG. **10B** illustrates an arrangement of queues for the output buffer **940**. At an output port **414**, in order to collate data segments belonging to the same packet, a number of output queues **1030** equivalent to the number of input ports **412** are required. This collation may be understood through a review of U.S. Patent Application No. 09/244,824, filed on February 4, 1999, and titled "Rate-Controlled Multi-Class High-Capacity Packet Switch", (the specification of which is incorporated herein by reference).

The main components of the edge node controller **580** are illustrated in FIG. **11**. A control data interface **1110** is used to send and receive control messages to and from the input-port controllers **540** and the output-port controllers **550**. An edge node control processor **1150** is central to the operation of the edge node controller **580** and therefor maintains a connection to a fabric scheduling device **1140**, a route selection device **1130** and a bitrate allocation device **1120**.

A data stream may be defined by a source node, a sink node and a path from the source node to the sink node. Within the viewpoint of the edge node **120** of FIG. **7**, that path corresponds to a transmission from one input port **412** to one output port **414**. A given data stream may support many connections. When a new connection request arrives at an input port **412**, the connection is associated with a data stream. Therefore, with the arrival of a new connection request, an increment in the bitrate allocated to the associated data stream is required. Hereinafter, one or more connection requests and a bitrate allocation increase request are used interchangeably.

In overview, a data stream, or a connection within a data stream, directed to a given destination arrives at a universal edge node **120**. It may then be the task of the universal edge node **120** to establish a connection to a given edge node towards the

destination of the data stream. At the input-port controller **540** associated with the input port **412** at which the data stream arrives, a connection type is determined for the data stream and the data stream is buffered. Through communication between the input-port controller **540** and the edge node controller **580**, a required bitrate is estimated for the connection to be established. Based on this estimated bitrate and the destination, a route (usually through a core network) to the given edge node is selected and a path for the data stream is set up on that route, with appropriate resources reserved along that path. To facilitate switching of many different types of data streams within the universal edge node **120**, the data stream may be segmented into equally-sized data segments. To mitigate output contention for this output port **414**, and other output ports **414**, a data-transfer schedule is determined by the edge node controller **580**, more specifically, by the fabric scheduling device **1140**, which specifies a time index at which each input port **412** may communicate data segments to specific output ports **414**.

It is important to note the universality of the universal edge node **120** from the standpoint of the many different connection types that may be handled. Connectionless data streams are expected to be the most straightforwardly handled. Exemplary connectionless data streams employ the well-known Internet Protocol (IP). Data segments of a connectionless data stream are sent on links comprising a route from source to destination on a best-effort basis. The rest of the connection types discussed herein involve end-to-end signaling to set up a path to the destination to be followed by the data stream. The "connection request", in response to which a path will be set up, specifies a requested bitrate. The bitrate request may be explicit, implicit or deduced from traffic observation. Once the path is set up, the path will have a capacity allocation equivalent to this requested bitrate, if that capacity allocation is available.

One routing protocol, that provides for end-to-end signaling to allow the determination of a path for a Protocol Data Unit (PDU, a generic name for a packet or cell) to take through a network, is called Multi-Protocol Label Switching (MPLS). MPLS is a technology for managing network traffic flow. One or more routes between a given edge node and a destination edge node may be predetermined at the source node. To set up a path, a route is selected. The given edge node

communicates with each of the nodes along the selected route to reserve capacity to the next node in the route. Each node in the selected route associates a label with a mapping of output to the next node in the selected route. By including, at the given edge node, the label in each PDU sent to the destination node, processing time is saved at each node that would be otherwise needed for the node to determine the address of the next node to which to forward a PDU. The path set up in this way is called a Label Switched Path (LSP). MPLS is called multi-protocol because it may be used in conjunction with the Internet Protocol (IP), the Asynchronous Transport Mode (ATM) and the frame relay network protocol.

Alternate network protocols exist wherein, through appropriate communication from an edge node, a path with a capacity to carry a requested bitrate may be set up. See, for instance, the applicant's European Patent Application EP 0 980 168 A2, published February 16, 2000 (hereby incorporated herein by reference), which describes a Universal Transfer Mode (UTM) of transferring payload data packets at a regulated bitrate. UTM may also be referred to as the Universal Internet Protocol (UIP).

Each input-port controller **540** of the universal edge node **120** includes a capability for high-capacity address translation (at the destination identifier **812**), a capability to regulate bitrate (at the segment dequeuing circuit **822**) and a capability to control bitrate increment (at the bitrate increment hysteresis controller **844**). The universal edge node **120** is intended to accommodate traffic of different types, including: connection-based traffic with capacity reservation; connection-based traffic without capacity reservation; connectionless traffic with provisional connections; conventional connectionless ("best-effort") traffic; non-Internet Protocol traffic using the MPLS or UIP protocols; and traffic structured in other forms. The use of provisional connections will be described below.

In a first broad type of connection, a bitrate is explicitly specified, as the data stream arrives at the universal edge node **120**, as a requirement of a connection. Exemplary connections of this first type employ the Asynchronous Transfer Mode (ATM) protocol or the UTM protocol and may, for instance, require a path with a capacity allocation of 40 Mbit/s.

In a second type of connection, a bitrate is not explicitly specified but, instead, various parameters describing the data stream are provided. Such parameters may included a mean bitrate, a peak bitrate and a dispersion or standard deviation of the bitrate. From the parameters provided by a data stream of this type, an effective
5 bitrate may be estimated and used by the universal edge node **120** in the request for the set up of a path. For example, a connection of this second type may specify a mean bitrate of 10 Mbit/s, a peak bitrate of 100 Mbit/s, and a burstiness coefficient. Based on this information, the effective bitrate may be estimated as 16 Mbit/s, for example. A path would then be requested having a capacity allocation of 16 Mbit/s.
10 Several methods for computing the effective bitrate are known in the art.

In a third type of connection, no bitrate is explicitly stated, nor are parameters describing the data stream provided. Instead, the universal edge node **120** essentially has permission to monitor the data stream and estimate a bitrate accordingly. The capacity allocation of a path for this third type of connection may be
15 altered over time, through the use of end-to-end signaling, responsive to the occupancy of a data queue within the input buffer **818** that is associated with the output port **414** of the data stream and according to a hysteresis-control process.

The transfer of data may be preferably performed under the control of the UIP or a similar protocol. According to the UIP, each data stream is treated as a
20 connection and the bitrate requirement for each connection may be estimated either by the traffic source or by the edge node supporting the traffic source. For connections of the above-introduced third type, bitrate allocation is preferably based on real-time traffic observation and may, therefore, be modified during a connection time. The traffic received at a given input port **412** may comprise numerous data
25 streams, each defined according to destinations and other attributes. The bitrate for an individual data stream is naturally more volatile than the combined bitrate for all the data streams of an input port **412**.

To avoid data loss or excessive delay at an input port **412**, requests, from traffic sources, for new connections should only be permitted to be sent to the edge
30 node control processor **1150** when the total occupancy of the input buffer **818** is below a threshold that assumes one of two values, L^* and H^* as indicated in FIG. 12.

A plot **1200** is illustrated in FIG. **12** for an on/off hysteresis-control process carried out by the on/off hysteresis controller **842**. The plot **1200** depicts two admission states labeled "0" and "1". When the admission state is "0", a request for a new connection for a data stream is rejected. When the admission state is "1", a request for a new connection for a data stream is further processed to determine its acceptance or otherwise based on available capacity and other criteria.

In order to avoid a high rate of state change between states 0 and 1, which high rate may increase a processing load, the transition from state 1 to state 0 is arranged to occur when the overall occupancy of the input buffer **818** equals or exceeds an upper bound H^* and the transition from state 0 to state 1 is allowed only when the overall occupancy of the input buffer **818** drops below a lower bound $L^* < H^*$. While a small bound difference ($H^* - L^*$) may unjustifiably increase the processing load, a large bound difference may reduce the processing load but may result in unnecessary rejection of bitrate allocation increase requests. A reasonable value of ($H^* - L^*$) may be determined based on the outer capacity of the source port **412S** (i.e., the highest bitrate at which the source port **412S** may receive data), the available capacity of the input buffer **818**, a selected acceptable time interval between successive state changes and an estimated fluctuation pattern of output-port load relative to the value considered at the admission decisions.

Segmentation of variable-size packets requires null padding of incomplete segments. The null-padding is removed at the output ports of the edge nodes. Thus, the data rate at input ports and at output ports corresponds to the requested bitrate allocations. Internal to the universal edge node **120**, however, the data rate may be increased due to null padding, and the increment by which the data rate may be increased is dependent of the packet-length distribution and, hence, can not be precisely determined. A slight internal expansion, as will be described below with reference to FIG. **16**, can offset the effect of this artificially-increased data rate. (The expansion also facilitates the data scheduling process as will be described below.) The on-off hysteresis-control mechanism, described with reference to FIG. **12**, prevents potential data loss at source ports by controlling the admission of new connection requests according to the total occupancy of source-port data buffers.

Restated, admission of a particular connection, i.e., whether the source port **412S** will receive the particular connection, is shown to be dependent upon the occupancy of the input buffer **818**. Initially, the admission control is in a “conditionally accept” state (state 1) wherein a request for a connection is conditionally accepted.

5 When the occupancy of the input buffer **818** exceeds an upper limit, H^* , the state of admission will change from state 1 (accept) to state 0 (reject) (transition point **1210**). While admission control is in this reject state, any request for a new connection or increased bitrate- allocation for a connection in progress will be rejected. That is, the universal edge node **120** will respond to the source of the data stream indicating

10 non-admission of the data stream. This state of rejection (state 0) will remain associated with the input buffer **818** until the input buffer occupancy decreases to less than a lower limit, L^* , at which point (transition point **1220**), the admission state is returned to conditionally accept (state 1).

As stated hereinbefore, a hysteresis-control process may be used to modify

15 the capacity allocation of a path based on observing the occupancy of the data queue **1020** corresponding to the output port **414** associated with the path. FIG. **13** illustrates a plot **1300** informative of changes made to the capacity allocation of a path as a result of this hysteresis-control process, where the changes are based on the occupancy of the data queue **1020** corresponding to the output port **414**

20 associated with the path. Note that the hysteresis-control process of FIG. **12** is based on the total occupancy of an input buffer **818**. The hysteresis-control process requires that an upper bound and a lower bound for the number of waiting data segments in a data queue **1020** be defined. If the number of waiting data segments, i.e., the data queue occupancy of a data queue **1020**, is less than (or equal to) the

25 lower bound, the data queue **1020** is defined to be in a left zone **1302**. If the occupancy is higher than (or equal to) the upper bound, the data queue **1020** is defined to be in a right zone **1306**. Otherwise, the data queue **1020** is defined to be in a favorite zone **1304**.

Restated, the plot **1300** illustrates changes in the capacity allocation of a path

30 as a function of the occupancy of an associated data queue **1020**. There are three zones. The left zone **1302** corresponds to a data queue occupancy below a predefined lower bound L , indicating a potential excess capacity allocation. The

favorite zone **1304** corresponds to a data queue occupancy between the lower bound L and an upper bound H. The right zone **1306** is a critical zone that corresponds to a data queue occupancy exceeding the upper bound H. It is noted that the plot **1300** is used for illustration only. In actual operation, data related to only two successive points on the plot need be retained.

The plot **1300** may be created by recording the data queue occupancy and allotted capacity at 16 consecutive instants in time, labeled t_1 to t_{16} . The buffer occupancies are denoted b_1 to b_{16} where buffer occupancy b_j corresponds to an observation at time t_j . Capacity (bitrate allocation) increments C_1 to C_2 , C_2 to C_3 , and C_3 to C_4 are requested (by the bitrate increment hysteresis controller **844**) at instants t_4 , t_5 , and t_6 . In this example, each bitrate allocation increase request is presumed to have been granted. A bitrate allocation increase request is illustrated to have been granted at t_4 , where the request was triggered by a transition from the favorite zone **1304** to the right zone **1306**. The bitrate allocation increase requests that are illustrated to have been granted at both t_5 and t_6 may be considered to have been triggered by data queue occupancy increases within the right zone **1306**. Changes in data queue occupancy, observed at instants t_7 to t_{10} , did not trigger requests for bitrate allocation changes. The bitrate allocation C_4 remains unchanged at observations t_7 , t_8 , t_9 and t_{10} . In this example, $b_{10} < b_8 < b_9 < b_7$. The transition from b_{10} to the lower value b_{11} crosses the lower-bound L and triggers a bitrate allocation decrease request which, when effected, leads to a capacity allocation decrement from C_4 to C_5 . The decrements from C_5 to C_6 , from C_6 to C_7 , and from C_7 to C_8 , are triggered by decreases in data queue occupancy within the left zone **1302**.

It is noted that when the data queue occupancy is zero for a given data stream or an individual connection, the bitrate allocation for the data stream or individual connection may be reduced in small steps at consecutive time intervals until a non-zero data queue occupancy is observed.

FIG. **14** illustrates the main steps for determining the required bitrate for a connection or a path. Preferably, a path is established for each data stream. Once a data packet is received (step **1408**) at the data receiver **810**, the address of the packet is determined (step **1410**) and the connection type of the packet is identified

(step **1412**) by the destination identifier **812**. Even beyond type of connection, it is necessary to determine a type of packet when sending the packet to the input buffer **818**. If the packet is determined to be a data packet, then the packet belongs to a connection in progress and the packet is directed to a corresponding data queue **1020**, perhaps based on the output port **414** to which the packet is to be sent. If the packet is determined to be a control packet, the packet is directed to a corresponding control-data queue **1010**. Where the control packet includes a bitrate allocation decrement request, the request is accepted and processed accordingly. If the control packet includes a bitrate allocation increment request or a request to establish a new connection, the control packet is processed only if the input port is in state 1, as described above with reference to FIG. **12**. Acceptance of a bitrate allocation increment request associated with a connection in progress is based on capacity availability on the existing path. A request to establish a new connection is processed according to connection type.

FIG. **14** depicts processing according to four connection types. If the connection type is determined (step **1414**) to be the third type where the required bitrate is to be deduced from data stream monitoring (see above), a state-dependent bitrate allocation is required. A default value is initially allocated for a path then the data queue **1020** corresponding to the data stream, of which the packet is a part, is monitored to assess the need for an increment or the availability of a decrement. This assessment of need or availability is based on observing of the state (occupancy) of the corresponding data queue **1020** (step **1416**), estimating a bitrate based on the observed state (step **1418**) and adjustment of the estimated bitrate to provide hysteresis-control (step **1420**) as described with reference to FIG. **13**. The estimated bitrate allocation requirement is then directed (step **1422**) to the bitrate allocation device **1120** (FIG. **11**). The bitrate allocation device **1120** accepts or rejects the request to establish a new connection, which is associated with the estimated bitrate allocation requirement, based on availability.

A detailed description of methods and apparatus for hysteresis-control (step **1420**) is given in Applicant's United States Patent Application Serial No. 09/132,465, titled "Universal Transfer Method and Network with distributed Switch".

If the connection type is determined to be the second type where the required bitrate is determined from parameters characterizing the data stream (step **1424**), the control packet includes traffic descriptors. These traffic descriptors are used when estimating a bitrate allocation requirement (step **1426**). The estimated bitrate allocation requirement is then directed (step **1422**) to the bitrate allocation device **1120**.

If the connection type is determined to be the first type where the required bitrate is specified (step **1430**), an explicit bitrate allocation requirement is extracted from the control packet (step **1432**) and directed (step **1422**) to the bitrate allocation device **1120**.

A data stream may also include connectionless data, for which a provisional connection may be established. A provisional connection can be established for connectionless data for two purposes. The first purpose is to speed up the transfer of packets at intermediate nodes and therefore increase the network throughput. The second purpose is to enable the edge-node controller **580** to provide quality-of-service when the network load conditions permit. A detailed description of provisional connections is given in Applicant's United States Patent Application Serial No. 09/132,465, titled "Universal Transfer Method and Network with distributed Switch".

When a bitrate allocation for a provisional connection is granted and successfully scheduled, the committed capacity on each link in the respective path is increased accordingly. The committed capacity is the sum of bitrate allocations granted to connections in progress. When a connection is released, or its bitrate-allocation is decreased, the committed capacity in each link traversed by the connection is adjusted accordingly.

A provisional connection uses the uncommitted capacity of the path of the data stream or the idle periods of the rate-regulated connections. However, the capacity granted may be revoked, or reduced, if capacity is required to accommodate a new connection, or to increase the bitrate allocation of an existing connection. A provisional connection is a privilege not a right.

When there are several unregulated connections within a path, all having the same origin and destination, the connections may be treated differently according to preferential service quality requirements, with each unregulated connection having its own service-quality index. This may be accomplished using any of weighted queuing mechanisms known in the art.

Once a data stream is admitted by a given input port **412** of the universal edge node **120**, the input-port controller **540** of the given input port **412** informs the route selection device **1130** of the edge node controller **580** of the destination of the data stream. It is then the task of the route selection device **1130** to select a route to a destination edge node for the data stream. The route-selection may be based on the courteous-routing method described in Applicants U.S. patent application filed on August 1, 2000, serial number 09/630,190, the specification of which is incorporated herein by reference. This selected route may then be communicated by the edge node controller **580** to the input-port controller **540**. Periodically, the route selection device **1130** may download route-sets from a network controller (not shown). The function of such a network controller, i.e., the monitoring of the state of links and nodes within the network and computation of routes from each edge node to each other edge node, may be performed at a single device, perhaps associated with a core node, or may be distributed throughout a network.

Where a data stream has been admitted and a route has been selected for the data stream, the data stream is then switched through the switching fabric **520**. Dependent upon the type of switch used for the switching fabric **520**, the data stream may have to be segmented into data segments of equal sizes. Segmenting of data streams in the input-port controller **540** is performed by the data formatter **820**. When such segmenting is performed, it is inevitable that the last of a set of data segments representative of a variable size packet will have some null padding to fill the part of the data segment that does not correspond to data from the packet. After switching through the switching fabric **520**, the data segments are received by the output port controller **550** and may be placed in the output buffer **918** in output queues **1030** according to the input port at which the segments originate. It is then a task of the output port controller **550** to reassemble the original packet from the data segments and send the packet on the path having the selected route through the network. See

U.S. Patent Application No. 09/244,824, filed on February 4, 1999, and titled "Rate-Controlled Multi-Class High-Capacity Packet Switch", (the specification of which is incorporated herein by reference) for a reference permitting the assembly of variable-size packets from non-consecutive data segments.

5 So that optimum use may be made of the switching fabric **520** of the universal edge node **120**, the fabric scheduling device **1140** is provided as part of the edge node controller **580**. The fabric scheduling device **1140**, given the bitrate allocated to the various data streams present at the input ports **412**, develops a schedule for the operation of the switching fabric **520**, specifically indicating the time slots at which
10 data segments are to be transferred from the input ports **412** to the output ports **414**.

 Scheduling basically translates bitrate allocations into a time table for transferring data segments from input ports to output ports.

 The switching fabric **520** can be a common memory switching fabric, a space switch, or a rotator-based switch. A common memory switch has limited scalability and may be used only if it is determined that the capacity limit of the common
15 memory switch is appropriate for a given network. A space switch with input buffers provides better scalability and has been extensively studied in the prior art. The scalability of a space switch is limited by two factors. The first limiting factor, and the more severe of the two, is the difficulty of scheduling, which is traditionally based on
20 arbitration among the input ports **412** vying for the same output ports **414**. The second limiting factor is the quadratic fabric complexity of the space switch. A scheduling method is provided herein for reducing the first factor limiting scalability of a space switch.

 The preferred implementation of the switching fabric **520**, however, is a
25 rotator-based switch. A rotator-based switch, to be described below with reference to FIG. **15A**, is scalable to very high capacities, of the order of tens of terabits per second with a very high number of ports, of the order of 10,000, for example. The main advantage of a rotator-based switch is a temporal disengagement property, which replaces complex arbitration with a matching process that includes a simple
30 look-up and comparison process. The rotator-based switching fabric has been

described in U.S. Patent No. 5,168,492, issued on Dec. 1, 1992 to Beshai et al., U.S. Patent No. 5,745,486, issued on April 28, 1998, to Beshai et al., and U.S. Patent No. 6,307,852, issued on October 23, 2001, to Fisher et al. An extension to handle variable-size packets is described in U.S. Patent Application No. 09/244,824, filed on February 4, 1999, and titled "Rate-Controlled Multi-Class High-Capacity Packet Switch". The rotator-based switch described in the above documents is devised for homogeneous ports, where each input port sends standard sized data segments and each output port processes the standard sized data segments to form variable size packets. Means are provided in U.S. Patent Application No. 09/244,824 to permit the assembly of variable-size packets from non-consecutive data segments. FIGS. 15A and 15B illustrate a rotator-based switching fabric that supports data streams of multiple granularity.

Briefly, a rotator-based switch operates by storing data for a deterministic period of time in an array of shared middle memories, as explained in the above-mentioned US patents. The ingress ports write data from ingress buffers to one or more sections in the middle memory, as dictated by the edge controller. During each cycle of the output rotator, the respective output ports read data segments from selected memory sections of the shared middle memories, as dictated by logical locations of those areas in the middle memories. In the example shown in FIGS. 15A and 15B, the shared middle memories are logically partitioned into two memory-block sections, and the links are divided into two groups. If a path comprises a single channel, an input port, under instructions from the edge-node controller, can forward data segments to the path during any memory access interval to memory sections allocated to that particular channel. With respect to a TDM path consisting of switched time slots during which a data segment is transferred, an input port, under instructions from the edge-node controller, can forward data segments to the path during any memory access interval. However, the number of data segments that can be forwarded in a rotator cycle is limited by the capacity allocated to the path, as determined by an admission controller (not illustrated).

To facilitate the transfer of data segments to the shared middle memories, the access intervals of a path are not pre-assigned by the admission controller. Instead,

the data segments allocated for each frame are transferred during any access interval, subject to the availability of a corresponding free memory section. The timeslots for each path are, however, assigned by a corresponding core-node controller (not illustrated). In order to enable a de-coupling of the timeslot allocations within the core node and the source node, timeslot interchange circuits, well understood in the art, are provided at corresponding output ports **414**. The timeslot interchange circuits facilitate connection co-ordination at the edge because of this de-coupling. The timeslot interchange circuits accept a data segment during any time slot, and forward that data segment during another timeslot, using a connection table that dictates the timeslot position of the data segment forwarded to the corresponding core node. For simplicity of operation, the cycle of the timeslot inter-changer is selected to equal the rotator cycle.

The edge node of FIGS. **15A** and **15B** is basically a combination of a source node and a sink node. The source ports support links connected to data traffic sources, and receiving ports receive data from respective core nodes. Each input port includes an input alignment buffer **1504** required for potential delay in accessing the addressed memory sections in middle memories **1502**. An input rotator **1506i** connects the input ports to the shared middle memories **1502**. An output rotator **1506o** connects the shared middle memories **1502** to the output ports.

Scheduling the switching of data segments across a switching fabric can be an intricate function that limits the capacity of the edge node. The computational effort to schedule the switching of data segments across a switching fabric can be extensive. As such, the speed of schedule computation may be lower than the data-transfer speed. This can be overcome by two measures. The first measure is called "Parallel Exclusive Scheduling". The second measure is called "Replicate Schedule Use". The two measures are incorporated in the scheduling method described below. They can be used individually or collectively.

The traffic from any input port **412** to any output port **414** is represented by an integer number of time slots in the scheduling frame. Thus, there is the potential of round-up waste, the highest value of which equals the number of output ports. The term "maximum relative capacity waste" may be defined to describe the situation

wherein the scheduling frame schedules packets from an input port **412** destined primarily for one sink node and the time slots assigned to the rest of the sink nodes are significantly underutilized. The maximum relative capacity waste for this scheme is $(N-1)/(S \times L)$, where N is the number of sink nodes, S is the number of time slots per frame, and L is the number of upstream channels. In general, the allocation requirement for each path, i.e., the required number of time slots per scheduling frame, is expressed as an integer number (possibly zero) of time slots, plus a fraction of a time slot. If the fraction is uniformly distributed between 0.0 and 1.0, the mean value of capacity waste would be half the maximum capacity waste.

Rather than scheduling data packets that are waiting in data queues **1020** in the input buffer **818**, the fabric scheduling device **1140** produces schedules for anticipated data packets, where the anticipation is based on an adaptive bitrate estimate. A scheduling frame having a specified number of time slots is used. The number of time slots per scheduling frame per source node should substantially exceed the number of sink nodes. Thus, in a network having 1,024 edge nodes (each edge node including a source node and a sink node as described earlier), where each edge node is connected to a core node by a link having multiple channels, the number of time slots per scheduling frame should be high enough to contain the relative capacity waste below a reasonable bound. With 1,024 time slots per frame, 1,024 edge nodes and eight upstream links (or channel-bands), the mean relative capacity waste would be 1/16 and the maximum relative capacity waste would be 1/8.

The data rate at the output of electronic source nodes is limited by the capability of electronic circuitry to values that are significantly smaller than the capacity of an optical fiber link. Likewise, electronic sink nodes can receive distinct data streams at relatively lower rates than what an optical fiber link can deliver. Where packets are to be transferred from a source node to the agile optical core **230**, the packets must be multiplexed into a wider spectrum and the data received from the agile optical core **230** must be demultiplexed into narrower spectra.

In one form of network structure and operation, both spectrum division and time division can be exercised at the edge nodes while only time division would be

exercised at the bufferless agile core node **280**. Time division is generally thought to be easier to manage than spectrum division. However, time division in a bufferless core node requires strict time coordination between the core node and the edge node **120**. One such scheme is described in Applicant's U.S. Patent Application, Serial No. 09/960,959, filed on September 25, 2001 and titled "Switched Channel-Band Network," the specification of which is incorporated herein by reference.

The universal edge node **120** is inherently fast switching and is provided with high-capacity input buffers **818**. The agile core node **280**, however, is bufferless and, hence, requires precise coordination with the source nodes in order to create time-slotted paths of fine granularities. A scheme based on effective time-sharing in an optical-core network requires that the edge nodes be time-locked to the core nodes, that all nodes be fast-switching and that a path between two edge nodes traverses a single optical core node. Direct connections among edge nodes **120** do not require time coordination, because the edge nodes **120** are equipped with input buffers and output buffers.

In order that the packet received from the universal edge node **120** at the agile core node **280** be switched to the appropriate edge node, precise timing is of paramount importance. This precise timing should be achieved while taking into account the effect of signal dispersion in the fiber links. To realize time-locking, each agile core node **280** has a master time-counter and each universal edge node **120** has at least one slave time-counter dedicated to each agile core node **280**. All time-counters, at the universal edge nodes **120** and the agile core nodes **280**, should have the same period and clock rate. The controller (not shown) of each agile core node **280** communicates with the sink nodes (recall that an edge node comprises a source node and a sink node) during at least one time slot per scheduling frame. This communication does not require the aforementioned time-locking procedure, due to the availability of buffers at the electronic sink node. In general, up-stream communication (from the source node to the core node) requires time-locking while downstream communication (from the core node to the sink node) does not require time-locking because of the availability of buffers at the sink nodes.

All output ports **414** require output buffers **918** for several reasons including (1) collating data segments of each packet, where data segments of a given packet received at an output port may be interposed by data segments of other packets, and (2) removal of null-padding, if any. A departure port **414C** connecting to a static core node **180** requires no timing circuitry. A departure port **414C** connecting to an agile core node **280** and switching entire channels and a departure port **414C** connecting to an agile core node **280** and switching time-shared channels (using time division and spectrum division as mentioned above) requires time-coordination circuitry.

In the hybrid network **300** (FIG. 3), comprising universal edge nodes **120** interconnected by bufferless core nodes **180**, **280**, the transfer of data bursts from the source nodes to the sink nodes via the core nodes **280** requires precise time coordination to prevent contention at the bufferless core nodes **280**. The above statement assumes that each universal edge node **120** comprises a source node and a sink node, where the source node and the sink node share an edge node controller **580** and have data buffers **818**, **918** and means for managing the data buffers **818**, **918**. The core nodes **280** preferably comprise a plurality of optical switches (not shown), each of which may switch entire channels or data blocks such as TDM data segments or data bursts. Note that core nodes **180** support fixed paths and are virtually static.

As described earlier, a first node X is said to be time-locked to a second node Y along a given channel, if, at any instant of time, the reading of a time-counter at the first node X equals the sum of a reading of a corresponding time-counter at the second node Y and the propagation time along the given channel from the first node X to the second node Y. This statement assumes that the propagation time is normalized to the time-counter period and that the time-counters at the first node X and the second node Y have the same time-counter period. There may be several channels connecting the first node X to the second node Y and a channel may be associated with an individual wavelength in a fiber link or several fiber links. Due to the difference in propagation delays of different channels connecting a source node of the first node X to a sink node of the second node Y, time-locking may be realized for the different channels individually. Due to dispersion, time-locking of individual

channels may be required even for channels defined by wavelengths in the same fiber link. When the first node X is time-locked to the second node Y along a given channel, the given channel is said to be time-locked.

At a core node **280**, in order to be able to switch data streams arriving from different universal edge nodes **120**, where each data stream experience a different propagation delay to the core node **280**, without contention or the need for data storage at the core node **280**, the universal edge nodes **120** must be time-locked to each optical switch at a core node **280**. A time-locking technique, also called time-coordination, is described in applicant's United States Patent Application Serial No. 09/286,431, filed on April 6, 1999, and titled "Self-Configuring Distributed Switch", the specification of which is incorporated herein by reference. With time-locking, the scheduling method in accordance with the present invention guarantees that data streams arrive to already free respective input-output ports of the optical switch.

As described above, for time-locking, each source node has at least one time-counter and each agile core node **280** has at least one time-counter. All time-counters have the same period and time-locking can be realized through an exchange of time-counter readings between each source node and its adjacent core node, i.e., the core node to which the source node is connected. The time-counter readings are carried in-band, alongside payload data destined to sink nodes, and each time-counter reading must be timed to arrive at a corresponding core node during a designated time interval. One difficulty of securing time-coordination arises from two interdependent requirements. The first requirement is that communicating a time-counter reading from a controller of a source node to a controller of a core node requires that the source node be time-locked to the core node. The second requirement is that time-locking a source node to a core node necessitates that a controller of the core node be able to receive a time-counter reading from the source node controller during a designated interval of time. To initiate or restore time-locking, a secondary mechanism is therefore required for directing upstream signals received from source nodes toward said edge controller, as described in Applicant's United States Patent Application filed November 13, 2001 and titled "Time-Coordination In A Burst-Switching Network".

The scheduling computational time per data segment is expected to be negligibly small in a common-memory switch and quite large in a space switch that has a large number of ports and relies on real-time arbitration among uncoordinated input ports attempting to connect to output ports. When two or more input ports have data segments destined to the same output port, an arbiter grants connection permission to one of said input ports, and the others must wait. Real-time arbitration is unsuitable for transferring packetized data across a large-scale space switch.

A rotator-based switch eliminates the need for arbitration and real-time segment scheduling is expected to be feasible with data segments of moderate sizes, of 10,000 bits for example. With data segments of small size, 1,000 bits for example, the arbitration time per data segment in a space switch would be an order of magnitude higher than a segment transfer time. The processing time required to find matching time slots at respective input and output ports is hereinafter called "matching processing-time". A matching processing time per data segment in a rotator-based switch would be significantly less than a corresponding arbitration time in a space switch, but it may still be higher than a transfer time per data segment.

A unified scheduling technique, according to the present invention, may be applied to scheduling for both space switches and rotator-based switches. The switching fabric **520** of a rotator-based switch is, however, scalable to a much higher capacity than the switching fabric **520** of a space switch. The unified scheduling technique is described below with reference to FIGS. **17** to **22**.

An input port **412** may provide a bitrate expansion where the capacity at the inner side (the switching fabric side) is higher than the capacity at the outer side (source side). For example, if the input port **412** supports data links of 10 Gb/s capacity, the source side of the input port need only have a capacity of 10 Gb/s. However, due to scheduling imperfection, the inner side may occasionally have to be idle due to contention for accessing a desired output port. Therefore, the inner capacity may be increased, for example to 12 Gb/s, to offset the idle-time effect.

FIG. **15A** illustrates a prior art rotator-based switch having a plurality of input ports **412**, a plurality of output ports **414**, a plurality of middle memories **1502**, an

input rotator and an output rotator. An input port **412** connects to one of the middle memories **1502** during an access interval, of 0.1 microseconds for example. The number of middle memories **1502** preferably equals the number of input ports **412**, so that during any access interval each input port has an opportunity to transfer a data segment. In a rotator cycle, each input port, through the input rotator, delivers data to each middle memory **1502**. Likewise, through the output rotator, each output port can receive data from each middle memory **1502** during a rotator cycle. The time required for any input port to visit each middle memory **1502**, i.e., the duration of a rotator cycle, equals the number of middle memories **1502** times the access time. If there are 8192 middle memories **1502**, for example, and the access time of any input port is 0.1 microseconds, then the duration of the rotator cycle is about 820 microseconds. A scheduling frame, to be described below, preferably has a period equal to the duration of a rotator cycle. If it is desired, however, to have a scheduling frame of a larger number of time slots, the scheduling frame may be selected to be an integer multiple of the duration of the rotator cycle. An edge controller **580** is connected to the rotator-based switch as indicated in FIG. **15A**.

A functional representation of the rotator-based switch of FIG. **15A** is given in FIG. **15B**, where the middle memories **1502** are shown to be logically divided into memory sections. Each row in the middle structure of FIG. **15B** corresponds to a middle memory **1502**.

Referring to FIG. **15B**, each middle memory **1502** is logically divided into a number of sections, the number of sections being at least equal to the number of output ports, and each output port is associated with a designated section. During an access interval, an input port can write a number, J , of data segments to any section in a middle memory and an output port can read a number, K , of data segments from a middle memory. The J data segments can be destined to the same output port, or to as many as J output ports. During an access interval, an output port is allowed to read the content of only one section in the middle memory to which said output port is connected. Hence, each section in each middle memory must be able to hold at least K data segments. When a section in a middle memory is read by an output port, the section occupancy reduces to zero and, hence, the section becomes ready to receive new data segments.

An input port attempting to write data segments to a given output port may find the corresponding section fully occupied. The input port would then attempt to write data segments, destined to another output, in the middle memory. For each input port, there is a one-to-one correspondence between an access interval and accesses to a middle memory. During a subsequent access interval, the input port attempts to write data segments destined to said given output port in another middle memory.

FIG. 16 illustrates the use of internal expansion in the rotator-based switching fabric of FIG. 15A and 15B. This internal expansion is introduced to reduce contention, for individual memory locations 1602 within a middle-memory 1600, between input ports 412 for the same output port 414. An input port 412 is allowed to write up to two data segments per middle-memory access interval while an output port 414 is allowed to read up to three data segments per middle-memory access interval. More generally, input ports 412 may be allowed to write up to P data segments per middle-memory access interval while output ports 414 may be allowed to read up to Q data segments per middle-memory access interval, where P and Q are integers with $Q > P$.

Scheduling may be performed using a "direct matching process". In a direct matching process, connections for a set of input-output pairs are scheduled for each time slot in a particular scheduling frame. In general, a data segment waiting in an input buffer 818 at an input port 412 is assigned a time slot in which both the input port 412 and the output port 414, required by the data segment, are unoccupied (free). Direct matching requires that the state of the required output port 414 of the data segments waiting in the data queues 1020 in the input buffer 818 of each input port 412 be known by the fabric scheduling device 1140. As the data queues 1020 are arranged by output port, this information is easily available. The fabric scheduling device 1140 matches data segments with time slots in which the appropriate input port 412 and the appropriate output port 414 are both free. The direct matching process according to the present invention is performed as a series of scheduling windows. In each scheduling window, a prescribed maximum number of data segments is scheduled.

FIG. 17A illustrates an input-state matrix **1710A** and an output-state matrix **1720A** to assist in the description of an exemplary direct matching process in a space switch. The input matrix **1710A** indicates a state (either free or busy) of each input port at each time slot of a scheduling frame. The scheduling frame in this example has 16 time slots. The output-state matrix **1720A** indicates a state of each output port at each time slot of the scheduling frame. The data in each row in matrix **1710A** is held in a separate memory. Similarly, the data in each row in matrix **1720A** is held in a separate memory. In its simplest form, there are $2 \times S$ memories in the fabric scheduling device **1140**, where S is the number of time slots per scheduling frame, as will be described with reference to FIG. 26. For a given data segment, the input-output pair is predetermined. A time slot is then selected for the given data segment where both the appropriate input port **412** and the appropriate output port **414** are free. This can be done in steps using parallel matching, described hereinafter.

In a general implementation, the N input ports **412** are divided into input port groups, each group having a maximum of G input ports. The S time slots per scheduling frame are divided into time windows each of which time windows has a maximum of W time slots. For ease of implementation of parallel scheduling, it is preferable that the number of input-port groups be equal to the number of time slot groups. The number of input-port groups is determined as $K = \lceil N/G \rceil$, where $\lceil r \rceil$ denoted the nearest higher integer to a real number r . The number of time windows is determined as $J = \lceil S/W \rceil$. A preferred parallel-scheduling process requires that $\lceil N/G \rceil = \lceil S/W \rceil$. For example if $N = 980$ input ports, $S = 2048$ time slots, and $W = 16$ time slots, then the number of time windows become 128, and the preferred maximum number of input ports per group is 8 input ports. This results in some of the input-port groups having less than 8 input ports. It is noted that the selection of the values of S and W is less constrained than the selection of the value of N . Hence, it is preferable to select both S and W to be powers of 2.

During a time slot in a time window, an input port can schedule the transfer of data segments to at most a prescribed number, q , of different output ports. This

process does not require coordination with other input ports because each of the plurality of schedulers operate exclusively on a single time window.

In the rotator-based fabric, there is a direct correspondence between a time slot in a scheduling frame and the middle memory that a given input port accesses.

5 In parallel matching, each input port **412** is concerned with scheduling in a single time slot. Thus, all N/G input-port groups may perform scheduling at the same time. After the scheduling is complete, each input-port group is assigned a new time window during which the input-port group schedules the transfer of data segments to output ports. For instance, in view of FIG. **17A**, input port 1 can schedule a data
10 segment to be sent to output port 4 in time slot 1, because output port 4 is free in time slot 1. At the same time, input ports 2 through 8 may be scheduling data segments in time slots 2 through 8 to respective output ports. At the next scheduling opportunity, input port 1 may schedule a data segment in time slot 9 while, at the same time, input ports 2 through 8 may be scheduling data segments in time slots 10
15 through 16.

At the next scheduling opportunity, illustrated in FIG. **17B**, input port 2 can schedule a data segment to be sent to output port 8 in time slot 1, because output port 8 is free in time slot 1. Note that if input port 2 has a data segment to send to output port 4, scheduling of that data segment will have to be delayed until input port
20 2 is scheduling in a time slot wherein output port 4 is free.

Where the matrices of FIG. **17A** indicate input-output pairings after the first scheduling window, an input matrix **1710B** and an output matrix **1720B** of FIG. **17B** indicate input-output pairings after the second scheduling opportunity, where a maximum number, q , of data segments scheduled per time slot per window is one.

25 FIG. **18A** depicts state matrices to assist in the description of a matching process in a rotator-based switch. The rows of an input state matrix **1810A** correspond to specific middle memories. These middle memories are grouped into time windows so that an input port **412** can transfer data segments to more than one output port in a given middle-memory access interval. An output state matrix **1820A**
30 shows which output port **414** to receive a data segment from the corresponding input

port **412** from the input state matrix **1810A**. FIG. **18B** shows an input state matrix **1810B** and an output state matrix **1820B** for a subsequent middle-memory access interval to that shown in FIG. **18A**.

The basic difference between matching in a space switch and matching in a rotator-based switch is that the rotator-based switch provides a natural de-coupling of the input-output pairs during any given time window. This natural de-coupling means that when input port 1 accesses middle memory 8, for example, input port 2 accesses middle memory 9, and so on. Thus, at any given time, input ports 1 and 2 are scheduling in respect of different middle memories and a scheduling collision, wherein two or more input ports **412** attempt to access the same output port **414**, is avoided.

A number of arrays are illustrated in FIGS. **19A** to **19E**. These arrays are used when scheduling use of time slots by the input ports **412**. An input-state array **1902** may be seen to correspond to a column of the input state matrix **1710A** of FIG. **17A**. The input-state array **1902** may be used to describe the state of a particular input port **412** in each of a set of time slots. In this example, where an element of the input-state array **1902** is "0", the input port **412** is free in the time slot that corresponds to the index of that element. Conversely, where an element of the input-state array **1902** is "1", the corresponding input port **412** is busy in the time slot that corresponds to the index of that element. A bitrate demand array **1904** (generated by a bitrate demand matrix generator described hereinafter) may be used to indicate, for a given input port **412**, how many data segments an input port **412** is allowed to transfer to an output port **414** during a scheduling frame. A bitrate demand array **1904** for each input port **412** may be assembled to form a bitrate demand matrix.

When scheduling for a given input port **412**, the fabric scheduling device **1140** requires the information contained in the input-state array **1902** so that a scheduling attempt is not made for a time slot that is already occupied. In fact, actual data segments may not be waiting in the data queues **1020** but, instead, the bitrate demand array **1904** may represent the number of data segments that are required to be scheduled per scheduling frame, based on bitrate allocation.

A flat-structure demand array **1906** is illustrated as an alternate form of the bitrate demand array **1904**. Rather than indicating a number of data segments waiting in a data queue **1020** corresponding to an output port **414**, an identity of an output port **414** is used as an element of the flat-structure demand array **1906**. The number of elements indicating a particular output port **414** matches the number of data segments per scheduling frame allocated to an input port and to be switched to the particular output port **414**. As the flat-structure demand array **1906** conveys equivalent information to the bitrate demand array **1904**, there are five elements indicating output port 2, two elements indicating output port 4, two elements indicating output port 5, one element indicating output port 7 and four elements indicating output port 8. If, when the fabric scheduling device **1140** is selecting data segments to schedule, the flat-structure demand array **1906** is read in the order that the elements are indexed, all of the data segments waiting in the data queue **1020** corresponding to output port 2 would be scheduled first, followed by the data segments waiting in the data queue **1020** corresponding to output port 4, and so on. To remedy this uneven distribution of scheduling opportunities, the elements in the flat-structure demand array **1906** may be scrambled to give a spread flat-structure demand array **1908**. The scrambling method may be arbitrarily chosen. A suggested scrambling scheme is illustrated in a scrambling table **1910**. To translate an old index number (in the flat-structure demand array **1906**) to a new index number (in the spread flat-structure demand array **1908**), a binary representation of the index number may be reversed in bit order. For instance, index number 1 (0001) becomes index number 8 (1000). Such a scrambling scheme may be implemented in hardware simply through the appropriate connection of addressing paths representative of the individual bits.

Parallel Exclusive Scheduling involves scheduling the transfer of data segments from the input ports **412** of the switching fabric **520** to the output ports **414**. A scheduling frame is associated with each of the input ports **412**, where the scheduling frame has a specified predetermined number of time slots and a predetermined duration that is equal for all input ports **412**. Each input port **412** generates a demand (vector) array (see the bitrate demand array **1904**, the flat-structure demand array **1906** and the spread flat-structure demand array **1908** of

FIG. 19) indicating the required number of time slots per scheduling frame for each output port 414. Parallel Exclusive Scheduling specifically involves dividing the plurality of input ports 412 into input-port groups. For each input port, the duration of the scheduling frame is divided into time windows. Non-intersecting scheduling domains are then formed, where each of the scheduling domains is a representation of an association between one of the input-port groups and one of the time windows. A scheduling process is then concurrently executing for each of the non-intersecting scheduling domains. The scheduling process for a given scheduling domain determines a schedule that indicates a timing for a transfer of data segments to predetermined ones of the output ports 414 from the input ports 412. This schedule relates to the transfer of data segments from the input ports 412 of the given scheduling domain during the time window of the given scheduling domain. The forming of domains and concurrent scheduling is then repeated for all permutations of the input-port groups and time windows.

The schedule, as determined above for a single duration of the scheduling frame, may be used for a configuration period, where the duration of the configuration period is an integer multiple of the duration of the scheduling frame. This use of a schedule for more than one scheduling frame duration is the above-mentioned Replicate Schedule Use.

The time taken to perform each scheduling process may be limited to an "execution time period". Additionally, each time the scheduling process is performed, this execution time period may be set differently, to accommodate changing traffic patterns.

FIG. 20 illustrates a scheduling time window having two non-adjacent time slots, corresponding to FIG. 17. A counterpart time window corresponding to FIG. 18 would be indexed by middle-memory instead of time slot. Note that a row in FIG. 17 corresponds to a time slot in a scheduling frame while a row in FIG. 18 corresponds to a middle memory in a rotator-based switching fabric. In a rotator-based switching fabric, with a scheduling frame comprising an integer multiple (usually one) of a rotator cycle, there is a correspondence between a time slot and a middle memory as viewed by a given input port.

A matching window comprises a number of time slots which are preferably non-consecutive.

When N is very large, over 1,000 ports for example, the direct matching process as described above can still be time consuming because each matching attempt during a time slot may require inspecting a large number of entries in a corresponding row in the output-state matrix. A large proportion of entries is likely to be irrelevant, having no corresponding traffic demand. Restated, there may be too many entries to inspect, most of which may correspond to non-existing traffic demand. As an alternative to bitrate demand matrices, nominal data queue occupancy derived from required bitrate allocations may be arranged in a demand ring-list and a predetermined number of entries in the demand ring-list may be used during each matching window. A demand ring-list may be structured in at least two ways. In the structure of FIG. 21A, illustrating an aggregate-demand ring list, an initial demand ring-list has a number of records **2110** that is less than or equal to the number of output ports **414** for which data segments are to be scheduled. In an aggregate-demand ring-list **2100A**, each record **2110** has a preceding record and a succeeding record. An exemplary record **2110A** is shown to contain four fields **2112A**, **2114A**, **2116A** and **2118A**. The first field **2112A** contains an identifier of a preceding record, the second field **2114A** contains an identifier of a succeeding record. The third field **2116A** contains an identifier of the output port **414** the corresponds to the record. The fourth field **2118A** contains an indication of the number of data segments destined to the output port **414** identified in the third field **2116A**. Notably, the aggregate-demand ring-list **2100A** corresponds to the bitrate demand array **1904** of FIG. 19B.

The aggregate-demand ring-list **2100A** is processed cyclically over successive time windows. During each time window, a number of records are processed to schedule at most a designated maximum number of data segments. With each data segment assignment, the corresponding fourth field **2118A** is reduced by one. When the number of remaining data segments, as indicated by the fourth field **2118A**, reaches zero, the record is deleted from the aggregate-demand ring-list **2100A**. This is done by writing the content of the second field **2114A** of the deleted record in the second field **2114A** of the record preceding the deleted record

and writing the content of the first field **2112A** of the deleted record in the first field **2112** of the record succeeding the deleted record. A resultant aggregate-demand ring-list **2100B** illustrates the result of scheduling the data segment queued for output port 7 and therefore deleting record 4 from the aggregate-demand ring-list **2100A**.

Each record **2110A** in the aggregate-demand ring-list **2100A** corresponds to aggregated traffic from an input port to an output port. The aggregate-demand ring-list **2100A** is therefore referenced as an Aggregate-demand ring-list.

A flat demand ring-list **2200A**, as depicted in FIG. **22A**, has a number of records **2210A** equal to the number of data segments to be scheduled. An exemplary record **2210A** has a top field **2212A**, a middle field **2214A** and a bottom field **2216A** that correspond to the first field **2112A**, the second field **2114A** and the third field **2116A** of the exemplary record **2110A** of the aggregate-demand ring-list **2100A** of FIG. **21**. The flat demand ring-list **2200A** is also visited cyclically and a predetermined number of records is processed during each time window. When the data segment corresponding to a record **2210A** is scheduled, the record is deleted by copying the middle field **2214** of the deleted record to the middle field **2214** of the record preceding the deleted record and copying the top field **2212** of the deleted record to the top field **2212** of the record succeeding the deleted record. A resultant flat demand ring-list **2200B** illustrates the result of scheduling the data segment, represented by record 13, queued for output port 8 and therefore deleting record 13 from the flat demand ring-list **2200A**.

The occupancy corresponding to already scheduled data segments increases during the scheduling period and, when the occupancy is low, fewer time slots need be examined because of the higher matching-success probability. The time slots of a window, even though they are not consecutive, must be examined sequentially when a demand ring-list is used. Thus, to reduce the processing effort, the width of the matching window may be increased with scheduled occupancy. Thus, the window size, measured in time slots, can be selected as eight initially, then increased to 16 when $\frac{1}{4}$ of the segments are allocated, then to 24, when $\frac{1}{2}$ of the data segments are

allocated, etc. The maximum number of data segments allocated per scheduling window is ideally a constant.

FIG. 23 illustrates two components of the fabric scheduling device **1140**, an input-port scheduling device **2320** and an output-port state memory **2330**. Each input-port controller **540** indicates a bitrate allocation (allocated by the bitrate allocation device **1120**) to the edge controller **580**. At the edge controller **580**, in particular, in the fabric scheduling device **1140**, there may exist one input-port scheduling device **2320** dedicated to each input-port controller **540**. In an alternative implementation, the input-port scheduling device **2320** may be dedicated to multiple input-port controllers **540**. When a scheduling device is used for two or more input ports **412**, the data from the input ports **412** are processed sequentially, one input port **412** at a time.

FIG. 24 illustrates a first implementation of the input-port scheduling device **2320A** that includes a time-slot assignment circuit **2420**, a bitrate allocation receiver **2410**, a bitrate demand matrix generator **2412**, an input-state memory **2414** and a switching schedule sender **2430**. The input-state memory **2414** stores an input-state array **1902** indicating the state of an input port during each time slot of a scheduling frame. It is possible that input-port scheduling device **2320** serve more than one input-port, in which case the input-state memory **2414** stores an input-state array **1902** for each input port served by the scheduler **2320**. The output-state memory **2330** stores an output-state matrix **2030** for a given time window.

In operation, each input-port controller **540** may send bitrate allocations to the corresponding input-port scheduling device **2320** within the fabric scheduling device **1140** of the edge controller **580**. The bitrate allocation receiver **2410** receives these bitrate allocations. The bitrate allocations are then passed to the bitrate demand matrix generator **2412** where the bitrate allocations are used to create a demand matrix, which is then stored at the bitrate demand matrix generator **2412**. Recall that a bitrate demand array (see **1904**, FIG. 19) for each input port **412** may be assembled to form a bitrate demand matrix. The time-slot assignment circuit **2420** reads the demand matrix stored at the bitrate demand matrix generator **2412**, the input state matrix **1710** from the input state memory **2414** and the output state matrix

1720 from the output state memory **2330** and uses these matrices to determine a schedule for transferring data segments from each input port **412**. The schedule, once determined, is sent by the time-slot assignment circuit **2420** to the switching schedule sender **2430**, where the schedule is held until an appropriate time, at which the schedule is sent to the input-port controller **540** of the input port served by the scheduling device **2320**. In a preferred implementation, a ring-list structure is used to store the bitrate allocation demand.

FIG. **25** illustrates a second implementation of input-port scheduling device **2320B**. In common with the first implementation of the input-port scheduling device **2320A**, the second implementation of input-port scheduling device **2320B** includes the bitrate allocation receiver **2410** and the switching schedule sender **2430**. The second implementation of input-port scheduling device **2320B** also includes a ring-list time-slot assignment circuit **2520**, a demand ring-list generator **2512** and an input ring-list memory **2514**.

In operation, each input-port controller **540** sends bitrate allocations to the corresponding input-port scheduling device **2320** within the fabric scheduling device **1140** of the edge controller **580**. The bitrate allocation receiver **2410** receives these bitrate allocations. The bitrate allocations are then passed to the demand ring-list generator **2512**, say as a flat-structure demand array (see **1906** and **1908**, FIG. **19**), where the bitrate allocations are used to create a demand ring-list, which is then stored at the demand ring-list generator **2512**. The structure of the demand ring-list was described above with reference to FIGS. **21** and **22**. The ring-list time-slot assignment circuit **2520** accesses the demand ring-list in the input ring-list memory **2414** and the output state matrix **1720** in the output state memory **2330** and uses this list and matrix to determine a schedule for transferring data segments from each input port **412** in an input-port group. The input ring-list memory **2514** for a given input port **412** stores a demand ring-list **2100** or **2200**. The schedule, once determined, is sent by the ring-list time-slot assignment circuit **2520** to the switching schedule sender **2430**, where the schedule is held until an appropriate time, at which the schedule is sent to the input-port controller **540** of the input port served by scheduling device **2320**.

It is noteworthy that the processing effort required to schedule a single data segment is independent of the size of the data segment. It is also noteworthy that scheduling a data segment requires several logical and arithmetic operations and the processing effort depends largely on the technique used for time slot allocation to data streams. If the size of a data segment is selected to be relatively large, for example 10,000 bits, then, at a channel rate of 10 Gb/s, a segment transit duration, i.e., the time required to transfer a data segment from an input port to the switch fabric or from the switch fabric to an output port, is one microsecond. This segment transit duration can be larger than the typical time required to schedule a data segment.

As described above, a rotator-based switch eliminates the need for arbitration and real-time segment scheduling would be feasible in a large-scale fabric, having for example 8,192 dual ports (a dual port is a paired input port and output port) each operating at 10 Gb/s, with a data segment size of the order of 10,000 bits. With a data segment of 1,000 bits, the arbitration time per data segment in a space switch can be many orders of magnitude higher than a segment transfer time while a matching processing time per data segment in a rotator-based fabric would be less than an order of magnitude higher than the transfer time of a data segment.

The unified scheduling technique, according to the present invention, described with reference to FIGS. 17 to 22, applies to both space switches and rotator-based switches. The fabric of a rotator-based switch is however scalable to much higher capacities in comparison with a space switch.

In order to speed up the time slot allocation process, an input-port scheduling device 2320 is dedicated to each input port 412 or a number of input ports forming an input-port group and an output-state memory 2330 is dedicated to a time slot or a time-window comprising a number of time slots. In FIG. 26, a two-way rotator 2620 (unrelated to the rotators of a rotator-based switching fabric) having K inputs and W outputs cyclically connects each input-port scheduling device 2320, of which there are K, to each output-state memory 2330 for a specified scheduling time window, of which there are W. The duration of each scheduling time window is sufficient to

enable the execution of a matching function, to be described below, for a predefined maximum number of data segments.

As described above, arbitration in an $N \times N$ space switch is prohibitively impractical when N is large, exceeding 1,000 for example. In order to avoid arbitration, a scheduling frame having a sufficiently large number of time slots, exceeding the number N of ports, may be used. During each time slot in a scheduling frame, each of the N input ports schedules the transfer of a specified number of data segments (preferably one) in non-intersecting time intervals. Thus, each input port scheduling device **2320** can function freely and independently in locating a time slot in which a particular output port **414** is free. During a complete rotation cycle, each input port **412** may schedule data segments for each time slot in the scheduling frame.

In order to reduce the matching blocking (i.e., where resources are available at both an input port **412** and an output port **414**, but not at corresponding time slots) of a request to accommodate a required bitrate for a data stream, an interval expansion, of 4:5 for example, may be provided in the switching fabric **520**. Thus, the maximum internal occupancy would be 0.8. The number of time slots to be considered in a matching process determines the probability of successful matching. If the internal occupancy at any instant is 0.7, for example, and assuming a random distribution of vacant time slots in a scheduling frame, then the inspection of 16 frame slots should yield a mean number of free locations of 4.8 and the probability of failing to find at least one matching time would be negligibly small.

Although, throughout the above, an optical core network has been assumed, the universal edge node **120** described herein should operate equally well with a bufferless electrical core network.

Other modifications will be apparent to those skilled in the art and, therefore, the invention is defined in the claims.